

# Sound, Music, Affect

Theorizing Sonic Experience

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# CONTENTS

*List of Figures* vii

*Contributor Biographies* ix

*Acknowledgements* xiii

Introduction: Somewhere between the signifying and the sublime 1

Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle

## **PART ONE** Affective (re)thinking: Sound as affect and affect as sound 25

### **1** Non-cochlear sound: On affect and exteriority 27

Will Schrimshaw

### **2** Felt as thought (or, musical abstraction and the semblance of affect) 45

eldritch Priest

### **3** My mother's scream 65

Patricia Ticineto Clough

## **PART TWO** Hearing, playing, feeling: Music and the organization of affect 73

### **4** So transported: Nina Simone, 'My Sweet Lord' and the (un)folding of affect 75

Richard Elliott

## CHAPTER FOUR

### So transported: Nina Simone, 'My Sweet Lord' and the (un)folding of affect

*Richard Elliott*

#### First channel

He decides, as he has done many times before, to listen to Nina Simone's recording of 'My Sweet Lord' from 1971. He chooses, on this occasion, the MP3 file stored on his smartphone, although on previous occasions he has listened to the CD *To Be Free*, or to the vinyl record *Emergency Ward*, where the performance takes up an entire side of the album. Listening on the smartphone allows him to play the recording at the start of a long train journey where he also intends to write part of an essay on his laptop. Other listenings in other locations allowed different actions: nodding or singing along, dancing, sharing, cooking, working, practising everyday life.

But for now he's speeding backwards through the countryside of South-West England, the world a green blur at the periphery of his vision, his fingers working at the keyboard as that particular configuration of electric bass, frantic percussion, gospel testifying and deep, resonant affirmation, that particular unfolding of affect that is 'My Sweet Lord', takes place, staking its temporary hold on *this time and place*, so similar and different to those earlier hearings, covering a different distance.

What remains the same? The song, of course, its various components: the half-minute of audience chanting 'We want Nina!' that precedes the performance; the announcer introducing 'the High Priestess of Soul, Sister Nina Simone!'; the surprisingly quiet (but vital) piano riff; the

groove-maintaining percussion (cymbals to begin, skins later); the prominently snaking electric bass; the repeated 'Hallelujah!' mantra, supplied, he recalls from the original album sleeve, by the Bethany Baptist Church Junior Choir of South Jamaica, NY; the appearance, just before the one-minute mark, of Simone's voice singing 'Oh my Lord', then 'I really wanna see you' (almost, but not quite, 'see ya' – he recalls the careful articulation that was a trademark of Simone's performances); the continuation, over several minutes, of the various lyrical ingredients ('oh my Lord', 'my sweet Lord', 'I really wanna see you'), the emergence, after a few minutes, of another voice adding wordless vocables – not quite scat, not quite doo-wop, not quite speaking in tongues, but something extra-verbally meaningful, a signifying on a testifying – above, around, behind, beyond, beside Simone's singing; the syncopated clapping that emerges at around five minutes and that recalls, for him, flamenco *compás*; the sudden becalming of the song at six-and-a-half minutes as Simone adds new words that serve as a reminder that the full title of this performance is 'My Sweet Lord / Today Is a Killer', that the 'song' is actually a 'medley' (both words seem inadequate) based on two previous recordings, by George Harrison and David Nelson, brought together in a performance that feels simultaneously improvised and carefully worked-out; the reassertion of beat, groove and choir a minute later, more intense now after the change in pace; the relentless continuation of these elements, this gospel experience, for several more minutes; the narration by Simone, from the thirteenth through to the sixteenth minute, of Nelson's poem, partly spoken, partly sung; the stop-start drama of the closing minutes as Harrison's Krishna-gospel song is treated to another full-band work-out; the recording's grand finale as Simone fuses Harrison's message with Nelson's, declaring God a 'killer' and having the Bethany Baptist Choir sign off on this blasphemy with a slow, angelic 'Hallelujah' at the 18-minute mark; 30 final seconds that mix applause with what appears to be a restarting of the song, faded out to bring the recording to an ambiguous conclusion. *What happened next?*, he wonders, then: *how did we get from here to there?* Then, because the mind is an unpredictable labyrinth of experiences and cross-references; he recalls lines from a poem by another Harrison: 'not so much that I got / there from here, which is everyone's / story: but the shape / of the voyage' (Harrison 2000: 303).

How does the shape of this voyage, this performance, affect him? What does 'My Sweet Lord' make him do or feel? To what extent does it occupy the moment in which it is experienced afresh and to what extent does his listening of it act as a meeting-point for new and accrued experience and knowledge? Where do his experience and knowledge overlap with those of others? How could he find out? A few narratives responding to the same performance are available to him (Butler 2002; Cohodas 2010). Like his own, the most readily available of these are responses to the recording of Simone's performance rather than to the original 'live' experience itself. But

then, that 'itself' ought to arouse suspicion. There cannot be 'a' response to the performance, only a patchwork of responses that might be stitched together to give a 'democratic' account of the event. But even if he, or I, were to track down attendees at the concert and quiz them on their experience, their responses would be mediated through the unreliable filter of memory. Even if it had been possible to rig machines to record the brain activity, nerve responses, heartbeat and other reactions of audience members at the time, we would still only be left with another partial account.

Another possibility: does the audio recording remember better than the audience? Could it help them to remember? It at least 'remembers' the sound, even if it cannot recall or recreate the feelings of the audience, settling instead for 'external' responses ('We Want Nina!', the extended applause). Then again, the transcriptive recording only recollects the sound that was available to those recording it, for recording is always a reduction of the phenomenal world. What is more, this particular recording has been edited and manipulated, meaning that we do not have a documentary 'record' of that particular performance but rather a 'recording', a creation as much of the studio as the concert hall.

He draws two initial conclusions. There is always a gap between affect and representation. But representations have their own affects.

## Second channel

Let us approach 'My Sweet Lord / Today Is a Killer' in a different manner, in a different voice, perhaps as different people. Nina Simone's performance is a composite of two songs, even if, as composite, it is made up of more than two 'elements'. It is worth considering those songs as another starting point in a discussion of Simone's work. In first place must come 'My Sweet Lord', which constitutes the bulk of the performance. The song was written and recorded by former Beatle George Harrison, who was responding, according to his own account, to at least two inspirations. One was the gospel song 'Oh Happy Day', as recorded by the Edwin Hawkins Singers. The other was a desire to combine the 'Hallelujah' mantra common to Christian music (especially gospel) with the *maha* mantra chanted by the Hare Krishna movement to which Harrison was partly connected having recently undertaken spiritual and musical education in India (Harrison 2002: 176). Harrison had initially given the song to Billy Preston, a musician associated with the Beatles. Preston included 'My Sweet Lord' on his 1970 album *Encouraging Words* (produced by Harrison), a few months prior to the release of Harrison's own version, which appeared on the latter's album *All Things Must Pass*. If 'Oh Happy Day' was the main *conscious* inspiration for 'My Sweet Lord', it would be another, apparently *subconscious*, influence that would attract controversy when Harrison

was sued by the copyright holders of the song 'He's So Fine' (a hit for the Chiffons in 1963). Following a court case, Harrison was found guilty of 'subconscious plagiarism' of the Chiffons' song and was ordered to pay damages.

Let us identify, then, another unfolding of affect: a song lodges itself in a Beatle's subconscious, re-emerging years later as a spiritually minded solo artist's attempt to connect to God. 'My Sweet Lord' ends up affecting not only its audience, but also the confused legal framework surrounding authorship, creativity, influence and ownership in the culture industry at large: 'one moment of performance, frozen in textual form, became the song "My Sweet Lord" in the eyes of the law' (Auslander 1999: 134).<sup>1</sup>

This is part of the baggage that 'My Sweet Lord' comes with, but what of the song itself? Preston's and Harrison's versions are fairly similar, which is perhaps not surprising given the proximity of their recording dates and the ongoing collaboration between the two artists. Harrison's version is a more obvious realization of the songwriter's desire to reconcile a conflicted spirituality. The potential for conflict and reconciliation is immediately signalled at the outset, as an electric guitar line unfolds itself from a 'sweet' acoustic strum, unfolding a different dynamic as it (the electric) becomes ever more limber, reaching upwards, seeking answers, the thickening musical texture moving forwards, to be met at the half-minute mark by Harrison's gentle vocal delivering the first 'My Sweet Lord'. The ensuing minutes produce 13 more articulations of 'My Sweet Lord', 21 of 'My Lord' and multiple variations of 'really wanna see you' and 'really wanna show you'. The other notable ingredient is the repeated response of the backing choir to Harrison's lines: initially a repeated 'Hallelujah', later morphing into 'Hare Krishna' and other phrases of the *maha* mantra. Harrison would later claim that 'My Sweet Lord' was more of a 'record' than a 'song' and that 'the overall sound of the record was as important as the words or the tune – the atmosphere really' (Harrison 2002: 176). The engineering of the sound supported his desire 'to show that "Halleluja" [sic.] and "Hare Krishna" are quite the same thing' (ibid.). As for the engineering of affect, the switch from 'Hallelujah' to 'Hare Krishna' was designed so that audiences more familiar with the former would find themselves chanting the latter 'before they knew what was going on' (ibid.).

The other 'song' included by Simone in her performance is 'Today Is a Killer' originally a poem by David Nelson and released on the sound track to the film *Right On!* by The Original Last Poets. The 'Original' tag was added to differentiate the trio – Gylan Kain, Felipe Luciano and

<sup>1</sup>The court, ruling in favour of the copyright holders to 'He's So Fine', claimed that '[Harrison's] subconscious knew [...] a song his conscious mind did not remember [...] This is, under the law, infringement of copyright, and is no less so even though subconsciously accomplished'. *Bright Tunes Music Corp. v. Harrisongs Music Ltd*, quoted in Auslander (1999: 153).

David Nelson – from the group The Last Poets, which they had formed in 1968 but which had, by the turn of the decade, morphed into a larger, looser collective from which the original members subsequently departed. The Last Poets – in all their formations – have regularly been cited, along with Gil Scott Heron, as popularizers of the declamatory rhythmic style of spoken word art that would later feed into hip-hop. Arising from the black nationalist movement of the late 1960s, their poems offered direct, uncompromising pronouncements on race, gender and class relations, often set to African-derived percussion. *Right On!*, directed by Herbert Danska, captured Kain, Luciano and Nelson delivering their poems to camera from a city rooftop, a simple presentation of the urban condition. 'Today Is a Killer' finds Nelson describing brief, transitory moments when he is drawn to wonder by watching the sea, listening to the wind, dreaming dreams and making wishes. In the poem's denouement, however, the 'glimpse of the timeless natural universe moving in effortless rhythm' is contrasted with the ugly reality of 'today', a time which destroys dreams, crushes wishes and kills.

Two songs, or non-songs, two articulations of wishing and hoping, one that seems to successfully connect to its imagined universe (and universality) and another that tells it like it is, asserting that reconciliation is not yet possible.

### Third channel

Perhaps, in order to understand 'My Sweet Lord / Today Is a Killer', we need to take account of Nina Simone herself, to consider her biography, beliefs and artistic style. Born Eunice Waymon in 1933, the child of a religious North Carolina family raised in the austere 1930s and who came of age in the civil rights era (the soundtrack to which included gospel songs and spirituals alongside more general folk and vernacular styles), Simone came to music via religion as a child prodigy accompanying her Methodist minister mother on the piano during church services. Simone's autobiography, published when she was nearing sixty, is full of references to the church and to the transformative power of gospel music. For Simone, this power was what Kathleen Stewart (2007) calls an 'ordinary affect', an everyday transformation, though it simultaneously harboured a potential for something out of the ordinary:

Gospel was part of church, which was part of normal life, and you don't sit around wondering exactly how it is you walk, or breathe, or do any other everyday thing. Even so, gospel taught me about improvisation, how to shape music in response to an audience and then how to shape the mood of the audience in response to my music. When I played I could

take a congregation where I wanted – calm them down or lift them up until they became completely lost in the music and atmosphere [...] Over the years those lessons slipped into my blood and became part of me. (Simone and Cleary 2003: 19)

While Simone came from religion and returned to it on numerous occasions through her career, the bulk of that career nonetheless took place in the secularized space of popular music. By the mid 1960s, at the height of her popularity, Simone had learned how to produce an equally powerful effect on a rather different 'congregation':

It was at this time [...] that I first began to feel the power and spirituality I could connect with when I played in front of an audience. I'd been performing for ten years, but it was only at this time that I felt a kind of state of grace come upon me on those occasions when everything fell into place. At such times I would give a concert that everyone who witnessed it would remember for years, and they would go home afterwards knowing that something very special had happened. (Simone and Cleary 2003: 92)

The 1960s, Simone's most prolific period as performer and recording artist, saw her move from supper club singer to 'civil rights diva' (Kahn 2003), her voice an increasingly vocal and bitter one in the struggle for equality. Self-authored songs such as 'Mississippi Goddam', 'Four Women' and 'Young Gifted and Black' combined outrage, defiance, political debate, historical trauma and hope to comment on the treatment of blacks in the USA (Feldstein 2005; Kernodle 2008; Brooks 2011). Simone also displayed her authorship through her defiance of musical categories and her 'possessive' treatment of other writers' material (Elliott 2013). Simone evidently liked George Harrison's work, for, in addition to 'My Sweet Lord', she performed 'Isn't It a Pity' and his Beatles-era song 'Here Comes the Sun'. Her choice of David Nelson's poem, meanwhile, was not particularly surprising. The Last Poets had made numerous references to her own work in their recordings and their politics were closely aligned to hers. Bearing in mind David Nathan's observation that Simone 'knew innately the power of sound, how the vibration of sound itself could impact heart, mind, body and soul' (Nathan 2008), it is worth noting how the recording of 'My Sweet Lord / Today Is a Killer' remains faithful to the engineered affects of its source material.

Perhaps, following a distinction made by jazz bassist and theorist William Parker, we should see what Simone does in such performances not so much as providing 'cover versions', but rather unearthing 'inside songs'. 'Every song', writes Parker, 'has an inside song which lives in the shadows, in-between the sounds and silences and behind the words, pulsating, waiting to be reborn as

a new song' (Parker 2010b). Commenting on his epic, innovative reworkings of Curtis Mayfield's songs, Parker claims: 'It was never the goal to do a cover; we can never play Curtis Mayfield better than Curtis Mayfield did [...] So we built another house out of the same wood they build basses and violins with' (ibid.). A kind of alchemy can be recognized here, one which matches gospel music's transformation of base musical elements into something new and transcendent. What Parker does with Mayfield's 'People Get Ready' is comparable to what Simone does with 'My Sweet Lord': gospel arrangement, choir, interpolation of another piece (called 'The Inside Song') and extended running time (14-and-a-half minutes).

## Fourth channel

Without wishing to engage too deeply with long-running debates concerning the role of music in religion, it is nevertheless worth pausing to consider the connection between words and melody in the religious tradition to which 'My Sweet Lord' attaches itself. To take the example of the *maha* mantra, the mantra merges into musical culture via a variety of melodies. The version included by George Harrison in 'My Sweet Lord' is based on melodies suggested by 'He's So Fine' and 'Oh Happy Day'. A version by the Radha Krishna Temple, produced by George Harrison and released on the Apple record label in 1971, utilizes a different melody. Alice Coltrane, meanwhile, recorded two quite different versions of the mantra: one instrumental, the other with vocals. The words of the mantra are of vital importance and the reciting of them is said to carry the chanter towards spiritual enlightenment. But how to account for the difference between word-sound vibrations and music-sound vibrations here? The mantra, however tied up with the forgetting of self, is nothing if not mnemonic, making it a technology of memory. But if both mantras and melodies are technologies of memory, the different musical settings of the *maha* mantra present potential clashes of both memory and affect.

The legal case surrounding 'My Sweet Lord' focused on plagiarism of melodic motifs, with little reference to lyrics beyond their syllabic value. Harrison's and Preston's versions differ both melodically and lyrically, with Harrison utilizing the *maha* mantra to a much greater extent than Preston. Nina Simone does not include the *maha* mantra at all, replacing it throughout her version with 'Hallelujah'. The reasons for this decision are not recorded but it does convert the song into a more explicitly Christian number, albeit one which contains the affective resonance of Krishna consciousness (perhaps a Krishna subconscious?). In approaching Nelson's lyric, meanwhile, Simone remains faithful to the words while adding her own melody. In both cases the source material is not so much treated as 'sacred' as it is mined for its 'inside' potential.

As Daniel Levitin notes, many religious thinkers have claimed that singing to God is intended to benefit the singer rather than the receiver of the message (Levitin 2010: 228). Chanting the *maha* mantra is something one does rather than something one witnesses; the chanting of the holy names, according to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, 'cleanses one's heart of all material dirt' (Bhaktivedanta 1976: 85). But witnessing must still be vitally important for the Krishna cause in that citizens are called upon to witness the chanting of the mantra in busy public places, recordings are made (such as the recording by the Radha Krishna Temple) and the message is mass-mediated. So too with gospel music, where witnessing, or testifying, encompasses both the taking part by choir and congregation and also the mediation of this process to other audiences (as exemplified, for example, by the multitude of gospel recordings, radio and TV broadcasts stretching back through the twentieth century and, in the internet era, the proliferation of gospel events online, especially on social media sites such as YouTube). There may be, as Jeffers Engelhardt (2012) notes, ontological differences between the ways music and religion relate in private and public spaces, but the relationships cannot be ignored.

If this has turned out to be the 'religious' channel, it should be pointed out that neither religious music nor particular religious movements are invoked here as ways to explain 'My Sweet Lord', for this would be reductive to both religious and musical traditions. There are not necessarily any spiritual, mystical or academic 'answers' awaiting us through such connections. Rather, there is recognition of the connections made in the haphazard meeting points of everyday life, the accumulation of knowledge and experience (extended consciousness, ordinary affects) that make such couplings relevant and interesting. It could be argued that once one starts to spot such connections, one spots them everywhere. This supposed tendency is one that has come under intense approbation from scholars who see it as a kind of 'bad hermeneutics'. But the point here is to recognize such connections as part and parcel of the affective work of a particular performance; what it helps to call into being, the possibilities it opens.

### Fifth channel

An event, a performance, unfolds, reveals itself, and something sticks: a memory in the bodies of those present; reports in the media; a sound recording which carries the residue of the event forward to other unfoldings in the bodies of future listeners. How does affect negotiate these conduits; what shape does the voyage take as the event drains from its original moment(s) and flows towards its destinations, perhaps to saturate, perhaps to evaporate? I have been drawn to such moments before, to the unpacking of stories which take place prior to, during and following particular

performances, marking them as both singular events and ongoing processes, as sites where multiple stories fold together (Elliott 2006). Event, in this sense, is datable and locatable, but also continuous, calling into being new processes of filiation and fidelity (Badiou 2005). I am unable to conclusively connect such processes to the seemingly immanent demands of affect: I just *sense* the connection. As various elements are unfolded and examined to make sense of the back stories attaching themselves to events, the unfolding itself partially constitutes the eventness. The process is only partial because the sum of the back stories (selected from potentially many more) does not add up to the totality of the event. There is always something extra, something that only comes about in the moment of performance. Badiou recognizes something similar when he writes that theatre:

is the assemblage of extremely disparate components, both material and ideal, whose only existence lies in the performance, in the act of theatrical representation. These components (a text, a place, some bodies, voices, costumes, lights, a public ...) are gathered together in an event, the performance, whose repetition, night after night, does not in any sense hinder the fact that, each and every time, the performance is evental, that is, singular. (Badiou 2004: 72)

There is another something extra, those elements that escape analysis. Or rather, the event is one unfolding and the process of analysis is another. They unfold into each other but never in a fully complete way.

### Other channels

I have chosen to call these sections 'channels', having discarded 'approaches' or 'perspectives'. One term suggests destinations where I wish to stress shapes of voyages; another is too visual where I wish to focus on the auditory. Channels are spaces of flow which can be easily thought of in sonic terms: streams, currents and eddies are other possibilities. For the remainder of this essay, the channels will not be numbered but will be presented in a more fragmented form, as eddies and currents that flow (or fold) into each other, at once distinct and unavoidably merged, miscegenated but not homogenized.

These channels, eddies or currents contain observations on performance, performativity, transport, affect. The form the rest of this essay takes is crafted to reflect the themes it discusses. Where scholarly analysis typically refolds the unfolding it has undertaken in order to present its findings as a coherent whole, as something always already known, the purpose here is to leave the story unfolded as both provocation (the user is invited to fold the narrative together) and as exposition of the layers at work in any serious

analysis of affect. These are not separate channels (although they may be subchannels) but rather ways of thinking about music and affect.

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'Performance' is a term which has appeared on numerous occasions in the foregoing. Not precisely the subject of this writing, the latter is nevertheless affected by previous works which have presented performance as everyday practice (Austin 1975; Certeau 1984; Goffman 1990; Derrida 1988; Butler 1999; Sedgwick 2003; Miller 2007; Massumi 2002; Stewart 2007) and as an interdependency of recording (Small 1998; Auslander 1999). Many of these writers display a notable performativity in their writing, not least when dealing with performance itself. J. Hillis Miller, for example, in a disambiguating essay on theories of performance and performativity presented by Austin, Butler and Derrida, makes great play of setting out the differences between each theorist, only to slyly let them merge together as his text develops. This, it turns out, is not sloppiness, but rather a carefully executed proving of the interdependency of these theories (and theorists) via an attempt to explore their differences. Miller's text thus performs its arguments rather than 'merely' stating them. Even within the playful 'disambiguation' provided, however, there still remains a seeming confusion over what 'performance' refers to in relation to music. When Miller distinguishes between the phrases, 'He gave his solemn promise that he would be here at ten', and, 'He gave a spectacular performance of Hamlet' (Miller 2007: 219), with the accompanying suggestion that the latter phrase might just as easily be substituted for one describing a musical performance, he seems to elide the actual performative elements of the musical performance. 'Performance' in music is not only the label given to what happens on stage; music is performative too: it does things. A musical performance is a creative act/ion that not only conforms to the fitting of itself to a template, but also brings about *something* new.

The starting point for many of the aforementioned writers is J. L. Austin's (1975) still fascinating account of speech acts, with its initial presentation of 'constative' speech acts (those that describe) and 'performative' speech acts (those that do). Miller relates how Austin starts to dismantle his own arguments about the 'seriousness' of performatives by including jokes and cultural allusions. When considering affect, the question of cultural allusion is an interesting one. How do we climb out of the moment to consider what cultural baggage we are bringing to it? We can't just dump the cargo at our feet (or in the cloakroom) while we hand ourselves over to the being-affected of the performance. Haven't we still got one eye on our bag, even as we dance around it? If the losing of the self in the trance moment is one that necessarily involves the forgetting of the socio-historical moment, of getting outside time and space (spatio-temporal removal), that does not alter the fact

that time and space brought us to that moment and that place. The cultural cannot be ignored. So it matters that 'My Sweet Lord' is a George Harrison song, that Nina Simone has made changes to it (more 'Hallelujah's, no 'Hare Krishna's) and interpolated it with another pre-existing text ('Today Is a Killer'). At the same time it does not matter in the least; the song, known or unknown, certainly unknowable in the sense of being unpredictable, is unfolding then and there.<sup>2</sup> Brian Massumi highlights the interplay of the present and the prior when he writes that 'The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds *contexts*, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated' (Massumi 2002: 30).

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Context is one thing; intertext is another. Yet, in a similar manner to dealing with the 'context paradox', to play the intertextual game is to seemingly stand outside the affective moment, to take a controlling stance. Are we always doing this when we stop to analyse affect, when we try to write about it for others? Aren't there already too many interventions, too many mediations, too many pauses and breaks and foldings and refoldings (and Massumi's 'infoldings') to ever get back 'into' the affective moment? Does affect, then, need to be thought of as more than a moment, as an ongoing process?

Intertextual infection is viral and multidirectional: time and causality are two of its victims. 'Due to's and 'leading to's are caught up in what Stewart calls 'the drag of affect' (Stewart 2007: 98). In legal terms it matters that 'He's So Fine' precedes 'Oh Happy Day' and 'My Sweet Lord', but, in the phenomenology of listening, no one can determine which comes first: I hear Harrison's song when I hear the Chiffons' and when I hear the Hawkins Singers'. In the timeless space of the listening experience, the chronologically earlier songs are infected via feedback loops; recordings by Harrison, Preston and Simone are folded back onto them. These folds hide the chronology so important to lawyers and scholars. I have to unfold 'My Sweet Lord' and its precursors if I wish to present Simone's recording as a clever piece of intertextuality that we, as listeners/scholars with time to listen, analyse, research and write, can recognize. But in the 'live' moment of listening, when I give myself over to 'My Sweet Lord', I give myself over to the becoming-other/becoming-one of the song and myself.

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<sup>2</sup>I should say 'here and now' after using the present tense but nothing can stop me from realizing that I am listening here and now to a recording made then and there, and that when I am talking about them (the audience) I should therefore use the latter term and when I am talking about me (another audience) I should use the former.



With regard to Miller, we need to distinguish between describing a performance and describing what a performance does to and for those involved. Both are descriptions, to be sure, but then Austin's, Derrida's and Miller's expositions of performativity are also descriptions. They are not themselves always performative, except in a few self-reflexive places where the authors attempt to demonstrate what they are writing about through some doing. So, to return to Miller's distinction, it is not the difference between describing a performative speech act and describing a good (or bad or mediocre) performance, but rather between the description of a performance as a good (or bad or mediocre) performance and the description of the transformative qualities of a performance. To say what the performance brings about is to operate in very similar (the same?) territory as that mapped by Austin.

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Massumi emphasizes the space between acting and being acted upon, suggesting, in his discussion of Ronald Reagan's autobiographical positing of a subject-forming event, that Reagan, in preparing to act, became the subject that he was acting. It is not too great a stretch to connect this to Derrida's theory of performativity as presented by Miller, wherein an utterance ('I love you') creates the situation it seems to describe. Alain Badiou helps us join the dots:

perhaps the theatre was already a metaphor for what love would become later on, because it was that moment when thought and body are in some way indistinguishable. They are exposed to the other in such a manner that you can't say, 'This is a body' or 'This is an idea'. The two are mixed up, language seizes the body, just as when you tell someone, 'I love you': you say that to someone living [...] but you are also addressing something that cannot be reduced to this simple material presence, something that is absolutely and simultaneously both beyond and within. (Badiou 2012: 84–5)

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Let us return to the performance space, a context-soaked and intertextual site that is simultaneously a stage for the activation of reflexes. We are already seeing that the immanent moment of perception is not unaffected by historical knowledge. As Massumi warns, 'It would be a mistake to equate the reflex with the purely physical. Perception is never only impression. It is already composite. Studding each impression are shards of intentions and conscious memories ...' (Massumi 2002: 75). Following on from Michel Serres, Bruno Latour and Pierre Lévy, Massumi uses the example of the

soccer ball and the football match to explore the concepts of proto-sport, game rules, event-space and collective becoming. The point at which he comes closest to what is being discussed here is when he considers the relationship between players and crowd. He describes 'play' as 'modification of a space', which seems a useful way to think about concert performances as well as sports events. As for fans, he notes how 'audience feedback is itself modulated by the spectators' accumulated individualizations of the game – their already-constituted knowledge of and attachment to the histories of the players and teams' (ibid.: 80). This touches on the paradox I have been worrying at, how the 'back story' of the event shapes the evental moment itself. A crowd comes to an event ready to give itself over to affect and to play its part in creating the affect. This is what Massumi calls the 'event-primed stadium', the event-space already marked for potential affect:

These bodies, in their eagerness (or at least willingness) to play their social roles, will have worked themselves into a state of heightened receptivity, a kind of panicked passivity marked by automatic repetition of assigned lines and a susceptibility to becoming-other, on cue. (ibid.: 55)

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What comes across again and again in descriptions of Nina Simone's concerts is the extent to which the crowd's expectations are met. Often they are not, but what is most surprising is that Simone seems to be able to calm audiences down after having angered them or shortchanged them – as if she does not have to do much to make the situation alright again. It really does seem to be an in-between moment, one that could easily go in any number of directions.

The stage as  
precipice.

So the power Simone speaks about, and which we used as the basis for describing affect, is frequently not there, or rather it only really emerges during the feedback loop, when the audience responds to her in a way that avoids her paranoia, that allows her to potentialize her promise. Performer and audience feed each other in a process of mutual becoming.

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Transportation, transformation, change, and movement: how to connect these terms? It has already been noted that religious practice emphasizes transformation and that this process is often related via reference to

transport. Gospel music, meanwhile, has often used mechanical forms of transport as metaphors for religious transformation. In 'People Get Ready', Curtis Mayfield urges his audience to climb aboard a train: 'all you need is faith to hear the diesels humming'. Other gospel songs have referred to automobiles, planes and even space travel; yet more refer to the mediation of messages across distances: 'Telephone to Glory', 'Jesus on the Mainline' and 'Turn Your Radio On'.

Such gadgets make effective metaphors for religious songs. But it is the music itself that is the primary mode of transport, as Daniel Levitin recognizes by naming a chapter on music and religion 'People Get Ready' (Levitin 2010); what listeners are really getting ready for is not a train but the locomotive potential of a song. This 'song' is already present in the poetry of the religious service or the mantra (an inside song, perhaps). Alice Coltrane, describing the *maha* mantra, claims: 'This music irrefutably transports my soul to one of the highest pavilions in creation' (Coltrane 2002a). Nina Simone, referring to the church services she would attend as a child (and which had not substantially changed 60 years later), relates how congregants would 'start to testify, shouting and tearing up, speaking in tongues ... running up and down the aisle ... the preacher gathering up all that spiritual energy and throwing it back out on the people. Women would have to go to hospital sometimes, they got so transported' (Simone and Cleary 2003: 18). Adding music to the equation takes the process even further, affirming a potential already present in the 'event-primed stadium' of the church or temple. The audience's role is obviously crucial here: they are part of the priming of the space and without them the potential would remain unrealized. It is their faith, in part, that keeps the diesels humming and actualizes music's potential. The process, then, is a becoming-one of the affect-space and the affected, a process equally true of sacred and secular spaces. Thus, James Baldwin is able to relate the 'power and glory' he felt when he realized, during the Pentecostal services of his youth, that 'the church and I were one' (Baldwin 1971: 36), while Linda Yablonsky can look back at a Nina Simone performance she witnessed and recall: 'In the audience, it was as if we all took the same drug at the same time, so easily did we become a single body instead of four hundred' (Yablonsky 2007: 65).

Speaking the year before her recording of 'My Sweet Lord', Nina Simone told an interviewer: 'I will not do anything for [the audience] at the expense of myself. But I try not to please myself at the expense of the audience. I'm always really striving to do both – to have a good time and for the audience to have a ball, too. As for my musicians, they are an extension of myself or they don't play with me' (Taylor 1993: 157). These simultaneous processes – awareness of maintaining self, accommodating the audience *to an extent* and allowing oneself to be extended by one's fellow musicians – all feed the folding, unfolding, infolding and mutual becoming of the

performance event, while also, in their extension into the recorded artefact, providing future audiences with an awareness of their having happened, of forwarding one affective moment into many more.

Such allusions to transformation and transportation are not without their paradoxes. Even as they stress oneness, they propose two points of a journey (a 'here' and a 'there') or two states, or stages, in a transformative process (multiplicity and oneness). Becoming one and becoming other, moving from one state to another, may be about the lessening of distance but we can't just remove distance from the equation. Recognition of transportation and transformation is itself recognition of distance. Theorists of affect have also been drawn to seemingly binary paradoxes, as, for example, when Seigworth and Gregg observe: 'With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter' (2010a: 3). As with the religious experiences alluded to above, this lack of distinction may matter less than the 'webbing' of relations, in-betweenness, forces of encounter, the becoming (other) of bodies. But distance is still there, even as a fleeting glimpse of the extraordinary in the ordinary. Simone seemed to be aware of this when describing the practice of yoga (which she learned from 'a swami from the Himalayas'): 'Yoga makes you feel kind of apart from everybody, which is my problem anyway' (Taylor 1993: 156). What she seems to touch upon here is the relationship between one 'artificial' process of becoming-one (yoga) and another (musical performance). Part of the tension of Simone performances – what makes them exciting, affective experiences – is the playing-out of an antagonism between involvement and distancing (Brooks 2011).

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We need distance not to disappear. It helps us to hear, for one thing. Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the '*distance* between sound and sense, a distance without which sonority would cease to be what it is' (2007: 58). Yet, in traversing this distance, we often fold edges together. Listening across the years to Nina Simone's performance of 'My Sweet Lord', we have no choice but to do this. Listening's main illusion is the short cut, which aids sound's metaphysics of presence and music's claims to authenticity.

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He steps down from train to platform. That he got here from there is everyone's story. But the shape the voyage took, its extraordinary ordinary affects: that is what is always remarkable. He becomes aware, again, of music as a form of public and private transport, as something that covers space and time, that takes us from here to there and there to here but not

the same way twice, not there and back again. Stepping on to the stage of the ordinary, the familiar, the homely, he alights from one sensory experience to another. He needs that distance not to disappear.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### (I can't get no) affect<sup>1</sup>

*John Mowitt*

Satisfaction obtained from a person's own genitals is indicated by all kinds of playing including piano playing. (Freud 2001: 156)

A formulation pertinent to the angle taken in what follows appears in the concluding section of Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema II: The Time Image*:

The theory of the cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of the cinema, which are no less practical, effective, existent than cinema itself. The great cinema authors are like the great painters or the great musicians: it is they who talk best about what they do. But, in talking, they become something else, they become philosophers or theoreticians – even Hawks who wanted no theories, even Godard when he pretended to distrust them. Cinema's concepts are not given in the cinema. And yet they are cinema's concepts, not theories about cinema. (Deleuze 1989a: 280)

What this clarifies is that my remarks are to be taken neither as a proposition about musical affect, nor as a proposition about music's utility in approaching the question of affect. Instead – and I realize that I am shaving a point – what follows is an effort to read '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction' as a thinking of affect in the musical idiom of rock-and-roll. As such, it picks up on the concept of the percussive field developed in my book *Percussion*:

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